

# **Professor Victor Voecks:** **A Faithful Laborer for the Lord**



James Plocher  
April 18, 1994  
Senior Church History Paper  
Professor Brenner

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 M. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin

## **Prof. Victor Albert Frederick "Sparky" Voecks**

Professor Victor Voecks was a man of determination, a man of principle, a man of detail. The work he performed in service to his Savior was invaluable as his Synod and his college grew. He saw great changes come upon Doctor Martin Luther College, the one place of his 42 year ministry. He saw a combined high school and college campus of 150 students and 12 faculty members grow into two separate schools. The college student body numbered 660 and the faculty 68 when the Lord called him home. He was a man of discipline and order who laid the basic groundwork that was needed for others to build upon as the schools grew.

The growth of the college was a result of the growth of the Synod. When Victor was born in 1904, he was baptized into the membership of the Wisconsin Synod, which was in a federation with the Minnesota Synod, the Michigan Synod, and the Nebraska Synod. He saw that federation merge into the "Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States." Eventually the name was changed again to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The dominant language of his church changed from German to English. Voecks experienced the Protestant controversy when he was in college and suffered through the break with the Missouri Synod and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference. His church body grew in size and expanded its missions. Professor Voecks

was directly involved with the training of the increased number of qualified teachers from DMLC.

As the Synod changed, so did the country. In 1904 there were no cars, airplanes, or televisions. Victor lived through both World Wars, the roaring twenties and the depression. He saw President Franklin D. Roosevelt help to restore the country to health. President Kennedy was assassinated. When he died in 1973, President Nixon was embattled with the Watergate scandal.

Through all these changes, Victor F. Voecks was a leader in his own unassuming way. He kept to the details of things, and got them done. He was a loving husband and father, a warm host, a trusted friend. Most of all, he was a man of strong faith who lived what he believed.

Victor Voecks was born on October 30, 1904, in Appleton, Wisconsin. He was the third son of Albert and Caroline (nee Goetz) Voecks. He had two older brothers (Herbert and Walter), a younger sister (Marie), and a younger brother (Carl). His father was an upstanding citizen of Appleton who cared deeply for the members of his church body. Albert Voecks had started Aid Association for Lutherans in his kitchen two years before Victor was born. Albert was the secretary of the young organization and his wife Caroline was his helper.

Victor grew up in a loving home. His brother Herb shared the same birthday with Vic, but still Herb remembers only good things from their childhood. The whole family was athletic and energetic. Victor, however, was a weak boy. He tired easily and could not take part in all the activities that his brothers did. His parents saw to it that Vic

received a membership into the local YMCA. There Vic was determined to work hard. Soon he became a strong athlete. Sports played a big role in his later life.

Vic attended grade school at St. Paul, his home church. He was delayed one year because of illness. Most likely he had Rheumatic Fever. He stayed at home and waited for the Lord to restore his health. In due time, Vic was able to return to school. At some time, also in grade school, the doctors thought it best to take his tonsils out, so they laid him on the dining room table and took them. Despite the setbacks, Victor graduated and was confirmed in 1918. Rev. F. M. Brandt was his confirming pastor.

Evidently, even at that young age, Vic was a ladies man. Rumor has it that if you look closely in the confirmation photo, Vic is holding hands with one Sada Lecker. The romance, if there was any, did not last. However, Sada grew to like Vic's oldest brother Herb. Herb and Sada were later married, and continue to enjoy their marriage today, in 1994.

After grade school, Victor moved to Watertown, Wisconsin, and attended Northwestern Preparatory School. Herb also began the business course offered by the college that fall of 1918. Herb only stayed one year before he accepted a job at a bank in Appleton. Victor remained on campus throughout.

World War I was in full swing in 1918. The <sup>m</sup>Military company dominated life on the campus. There was no football in those war years. It would return when things settled down. Vic did show his athletic prowess in basketball and baseball. Basketball was played not against other schools, but against the other classes. His tertia (fourth) year team was undefeated.

Following the prescribed course of study for becoming a pastor, Vic made the transition to Northwestern College. He entered NWC in the fall of 1923 and was elected president of his class. The college had a large enrollment of 105 that fall. Opening exercises had to be held in the gym because the recitation building was not large enough. There were problems with space on campus throughout his college years.

Those last years of Prep and the first of College took place in the context of the Protéstant controversy. After Professor Karl Koehler left his teaching post at Northwestern College in 1924, he wrote a letter to the Freshman Class President, Victor Voecks. He simply tied up loose ends with the class he taught. He said that he did what he felt was best for himself and for the school. He encouraged Vic and his class to continue to study hard for the ministry.

I do not know what kind of a student Vic was, but it is easily discovered that he excelled outside of the classroom. At Northwestern he earned his nickname, "Sparky." It seemed that he had a flair with the ladies. His sophomore basketball team jersey had the name "Spark Plug" written on it. Even though he may have caused the sparks to fly, he was unable to snare a lifelong companion. He dated Margarete Meyer for a time. Eventually, however, she married Walter J. Schmidt. Vic and Margarete's paths crossed again. Rev. Schmidt became Sparky's pastor at St. Paul's in New Ulm. The two families remained close friends throughout their lives.

At NWC Sparky also excelled on the sports fields. He earned thirteen "N" letters during his stay there. He played end in football, guard in basketball and first and second base in baseball. He was in the chorus. He played coronet in the band and was the vice

president of that organization his senior year. Vic was the advertising manager for the Black and Red his final year. He remained his class president and was also named the president of the student body.

Basketball was not yet an intercollegiate sport in 1923 when Vic entered Northwestern. Competition was still inter-class. The school had a wonderful playing area in the new gym (which is now the auditorium). Finally, in the fall of 1926, basketball gained intercollegiate status.

It was a wonder that Sparky could play basketball that fall. He had missed football because of a severe knee injury suffered the previous spring in baseball. The Black and Red noted that he injured his knee "to such an extent that, it is feared, he will be permanently disabled for athletics."<sup>1</sup> Sparky was determined to recover, and he was able to return to basketball with a brace on his left knee. He was a valuable asset to the team. It did not seem that he was a high scorer, but his defense must have been sharp. Often it was noted in the Black and Red that he was tough as nails to get around on the court. His knee injury did bother him into his early years at New Ulm. Sometimes it even slipped out of joint and he had to use crutches for a while until it healed. Because of his determination, he still managed to remain active in sports for many productive years.

The years at Northwestern passed otherwise uneventfully. He graduated with a class of 12 and went on to the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

Before his three years there were complete, a major change took place. The new Seminary had been built in Thiensville, and his class had the privilege of moving the school

---

<sup>1</sup> Black and Red, Vol 30, No. 3, page 115, Commencement Number 1926.

north. The students were expected to help carry the school's books and supplies to Thiensville. His class was the first to graduate from the new campus. He completed his studies in 1930 and awaited a call with his class of 17.

It seems that Victor Voecks received his assignment first to Escanaba, Michigan. However, on the afternoon of Call Day, the president asked him to reconsider and accept a one year tutorship at the Synod's teacher training school in New Ulm, Doctor Martin Luther College. The coach at DMLC, Prof. Palmbach, was unable to perform his classroom duties and all the things required of a coach. He knew of Sparky's abilities in sports and he knew that he was single. Vic was to help out with athletics and teach a few classes. Vic accepted the new call.

While at the Seminary, Sparky had met another young lady. He had been refereeing for basketball games at Lutheran High in Milwaukee. The girls' team had a star guard named Olga Ulichny. She graduated in 1928 from high school and continued her education at the University of Milwaukee. Sparky continued to referee, and then became the coach of the Lutheran High teams. Olga's brother, Arthur, played under Coach Voecks.

Lutheran High also had an alumni sports league. Those who had graduated could come and play basketball when the gym was empty. Olga did not let her basketball talent lie unused and became a leader of the alumni team. It became her job to get the key to the building from Coach Voecks. They both enjoyed those brief meetings. Sparky soon took such an interest in the play of Art Ulichny that he often accompanied him to his

home in Cudahy to talk basketball. Of course, he also would have ample opportunity to talk with Art's sister, Olga. The romance began to blossom.

But then Call Day came, and Victor was whisked off to New Ulm, Minnesota. He was the first tutor that DMLC had. He lived in the dorm. Vic expected fully to remain only for one year. He had a temporary call to help out with athletics and some teaching during a time of transition. The 1930-31 school year was the first with a three year graduating class. For the first 46 years of its existence it had only offered two years of college education for teachers.

While in New Ulm, Vic did not forget about his sweetheart in Milwaukee. Olga and he communicated often by mail. Because there was no postal delivery to the college at that time, Instructor Voecks convinced students to run his letters to the post office. There were many letters from the Ulichny's in Cudahy to carry back up the hill.

Evidently, Coach Voecks performed his duties well. When Inspector Wagner died suddenly from complications of gall bladder surgery, President Bliefernicht asked Victor to stay at the college indefinitely.

Vic moved from the dorm into a house owned by the Synod. He lived in two rooms upstairs, since another family was renting the rest of the house. At that time, the school on the hill was both a high school and a three year college. Its purpose was to prepare young men and women to be the teachers in the Synod's grade schools. That purpose remains the same today. The school then had an enrollment of 150 people in both college and high school. It had a faculty of twelve.



Victor was given more coaching duties when Professor Palmbach resigned in 1931. He also gained the title of Athletic Director. He was the first person to hold that title at this school. He kept it for sixteen years until he passed the hat on to Professor Oldfield. Coach Voecks remained the hands-on teacher for the men's athletic teams on the hill. There were no women's sports. He coached football, basketball, and baseball. He was in charge of cheerleading (which, when it was introduced in 1930, was for men), calisthenics (for the women), and intramurals. There was nothing that dealt with the athletic recreation of the students in which the Athletic Director and Coach did not have a hand. Vic also taught regular classes in general History and Latin. Latin became his favorite subject.

Olga did not remain idle while Vic was off teaching. In 1931, she was asked to take part in the Early Childhood Program at the University of Wisconsin. This was a pilot program that was offered to only two students. The program was the forerunner of Montessori Schools. But she would never become a teacher of children. She graduated from the University on August 5, 1932. The next day, August 6, she and Victor Voecks were married in a grand ceremony at St. John's Church in Cudahy, Wisconsin. The pastor who married them was Rev. Masak from the Slovak church. A Wisconsin Synod pastor, Rev. Horlemuss, preached the sermon.

The renters had moved out of the house in which Vic was living, so he brought his new bride to his home at 221 S. Jefferson Street. He eventually bought the house from the Synod, and Olga still resides there. Those first years were tough. It was the height of the depression and salaries were cut for the professors. Decisions had to be made whether

to pay the Synod's missionaries or to pay its professors. Usually the money went overseas <sup>since</sup> since the professors could rely on the kindness of their neighbors and friends. Victor's first year salary of \$45 a month was cut the next year to \$27. Sometimes the check would not come at all. The Synod promised that the money would be repaid at a later date, but it was never seen.

Yet, the Lord provided what was necessary for the new family. Those days the Voecks's relied heavily on generous care packages sent by train from Cudahy. The boxes were large and eagerly anticipated. Mom Ulichny could not let her daughter starve out in the wilderness.

1934 was a banner year for the young professor and his wife. In March their first child, Naomi, was born. In May they travelled to Appleton, Wisconsin. There, in a service on May 17, Victor Voecks was officially ordained into the public ministry. It was not uncommon for someone who was assigned as a tutor to have a later ordination. That fall, DMLC celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Even though Coach Voecks was extremely busy with all the athletics on the hill, he also found time for recreation. He would travel to Mankato to watch other teams play football. He refereed many games for the New Ulm High School teams. After the games, he would spend time socializing with the fans. Often he would end the evening talking with a Catholic priest. Vic was always tactful and proper. He conducted himself as a gentleman at all times. The priest's comment about Sparky was this: "I never met a man I liked disagreeing with more." One of the highlights of Coach Voecks' refereeing career was a game with the Harlem Globetrotters. Of course, the Globetrotters won the game.

Thanks to connections back in Milwaukee, Victor was able to provide a first for the Hilltoppers. Art Ulichny, Vic's brother-in-law, was selling cars. He came upon a 1936 grey Cadillac Limousine. He arranged for the college to buy it for \$400. The school's teams now had a bus! They no longer had to find people to take them to the games in their own cars. What a great stride forward! The school sold the Cadillac in 1946 for \$1100 and bought a school bus.

The years between 1932 and 1936 were uneasy ones at the school on the hill. President Bliefernicht was ill and often unable to function as the leader of the college. Vice President Schweppe filled in as best as he could. Enrollment figures slipped drastically. There was always hope that President Bliefernicht would regain his health. By 1936 that hope was given up. Rev. Carl Schweppe became the President of the school, and Bliefernicht moved to Vice President. A new era for the school had begun.

There were few changes at the school in the next years. The faculty grew as teachers and the school regained strength and momentum. Enrollment figures began to rise again and many gained confidence in the ability of the college to train qualified teachers for their children. 1938 was the first year that DMLC offered a Summer Institute. Teachers and Pastors were invited to attend courses in homiletics, dogmatics, New Testament Exegesis, church history, progressive education and grade school arts.<sup>2</sup> A new learning opportunity was also provided for the women of the third year class. They

---

<sup>2</sup> Schroeder, p 115.

were placed in the kindergarten class of St. Paul's school for half a day throughout the week.<sup>3</sup>

Victor continued to coach athletics and teach Latin and history. The sports program had many uphill battles to face. Games between colleges were hard to come by and often required long road trips. The Hilltoppers often were undersized and under equipped compared to their opponents. As an example, look at the state of the football program in the early years. Football was an expensive sport to play and it required quite a few men to play it. DMLC did not have a team. However, with some encouragement from the coach, local businessmen donated money for uniforms and supplies. At last football could be played! Yet, it was a primitive game. The school only owned 11 pair of shoes. The players who were on the field got to wear them. Those on the bench did not. When there was a substitution, there was also a change of shoes. The players on the bench continually hoped that the person coming off the field had a large pair of shoes!

Coach Voecks did all that he could to secure teams for his school to play. He was instrumental in the formation of the Southern Minnesota Junior College Conference. Three schools, Concordia (St. Paul), Pillsbury, and DMLC, agreed to regular games in Basketball. The conference helped to get the athletic program some needed recognition and stability.

Despite the heartache on the field, in the classroom Professor Voecks excelled. He taught high school Latin as few people in our Synod ever have. He demanded a thorough knowledge of the subject. If a student did not know the answer to his question, he would

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

wait. Sometimes the class would be silent for fifteen minutes straight. By the next class, the student was certain to have learned his vocables and declensions! When the students passed on to the halls of Northwestern College, it was obvious to the professors there who had learned their Latin from Professor Voecks.

Besides teaching Latin, Victor also taught general history. He pursued opportunities for continuing education at the University of Wisconsin - Madison for at least two summers around 1940. He wrote two papers, both dealing with the unrest in Germany and Europe. He would have continued for a degree in history, but President Schweppe convinced him that degrees were not important. Besides, the financial situation at the school was difficult and the money could be spent in better places.

Ten years into his ministry, Victor Voecks stopped to look at his situation. He was actively involved with coaching. He taught Latin and History well, improving the lives of his students. But he could not spend the time he wanted with his classes nor with his growing family. His second child, Michael, was born in 1938.

The remedy, as Vic saw it, was to reduce his coaching load. He wrote a letter to the Board of Control on March 16, 1940. The board was considering calling a new person to the faculty. In the letter Vic requested to be relieved of his duties in the athletic department. His reasons were listed as: 1) When he accepted the position, the board had (unofficially) indicated that they would honor such a request if he desired it. 2) With the passing of the years, he had lost some of the zeal for athletics that a younger man has. 3) "I am beginning to wonder whether the effort put into such a passing thing [athletics] is effort well spent. For that same reason I also feel that during these ten years I have not

grown enough in the more worthwhile things." 4) The long road trips, often of over one hundred miles, were very burdensome, especially during the winter with the weather and late hours involved. The Board did not grant his request. He remained both Athletic Director and Coach for six more years.

During those six years, Professor Voecks grew as a teacher. His family grew as well. In 1943 his third child, a daughter whom he named Garda, was born. Victor made many trips to Milwaukee on school business during those years. He travelled by train. One December evening in 1943, when Garda was only four months old, Olga left the house to pick Vic up at the train station. A Minnesota snowstorm had arrived that day, and it caused the train to be late. Olga expected Vic at midnight, but was still waiting three hours later. Meanwhile the children were at home without supervision. Olga debated whether to risk the drive home in the snow or to wait for a while more. She waited. Finally, after 3:30 a.m. the train arrived. Vic and Olga got into the car and drove home. About three blocks from their house, the car ran out of gas. Vic was furious that Olga could have forgotten to fill up the car. They got out and trudged through the snow. Finally they arrived at home, anxious about the children. The Lord watched over the children that night — they were all sound asleep.

In the classroom, Vic expanded his teaching methods. In history class, he would draw a line on the chalkboard and ask the students to tell him which river it was. He would usually draw the European rivers. By knowing the rivers of Europe, the students would be able to place the events of history better and relate them to current events as well.

Ever the man of detail, Vic would not let his students dress haphazardly. If one did not have a tie on, he would not begin class until the student returned with the proper attire. Professor Voecks himself always dressed well. He wore a three piece suit almost always. Even when he was studying in his office in the heat of summer, the coat rarely came off. He was even meticulous about his ties. He would never wear them in a predictable pattern. They all got equal use. He bought his first sport coat in the 1970's, just before he died.

As demanding a professor as Sparky was, he also was very fair. No one could complain that he was treating some people with favoritism. He did not make it easy for anyone. He held himself to the ideal that no one should ever score 100% on his tests. If someone knew all the answers, he had failed to challenge that student enough. But he also avoided the other extreme. He did not like to have everyone do poorly on a test, or he had written a bad exam. He never re-used his tests. He copied them the morning of the examination and kept them in his briefcase. Even if a student missed class and had to take the test at a different time, Prof. Voecks would make up a different test for him.

One of the philosophies that Vic adhered to was the conviction that anyone can be mediocre. It took work to be better than average, so he expected his students and his children to try their hardest. He was never disappointed with the results when people gave their best effort to a task.

Professor Voecks always stood up for his principles. One morning, four female students who lived in a house off campus did not show up for classes. They had been model students. They arrived late, insisting that the alarm had not rung to awaken them

for class. The Professor awarded them each an unexcused absence. They protested to no avail. They even went to the dean and president seeking a reprieve. Finally they were urged to talk the issue over with Prof. Voecks. Vic explained that the excuse of a failed alarm clock was not a valid one for missing class when you are a teacher. It also can not be a valid excuse for students. The four women agreed, and accepted their unexcused absence.

During this time, when things were pretty calm in the world and in New Ulm, Victor entertained ideas for making some extra money. One of his favorite evening pastimes was to take his children out for a drive, see some sights, and return to buy some frozen custard from the dairy. It was a dream of his to be able to open a frozen custard business of his own. He foresaw great potential in a specialized market. The idea never went beyond his head.

In the 1950's Vic actually put one of his money-making ideas into action. A neighbor owned shares in a mink farm. Vic decided that he could have a bit of income from raising animals too. He bought some chinchilla and kept them in cages in the basement. Supposedly, their fur could be sold for a good profit. Soon they were moved to the garage. He had great fun with them, as did the kids. As a business venture, it failed.

Vic and Olga's children were growing up. He tried to spend time with them whenever he could. Mostly because of his son, Vic got involved with model trains. He built the cars at home and took them to a track layout elsewhere in town. Mike soon knew all the various models and types of trains.



The calm in the world exploded when World War II began. Professors had to supplement their income by working outside jobs during the summer. Victor supervised the public pool and worked at the local cannery. One year he helped with the bookkeeping at a construction company. He was so good, the owner asked him to quit teaching and become his partner. Vic decided to teach.

During the war, great changes occurred in New Ulm. The school called a new professor, Rev. Oldfield, to be the coach and athletic director. He came in the fall of 1946. In January of 1947, Prof. Bliefernicht died suddenly. In the restructuring of duties that followed, Professor Voecks saw his role at the college change. Vic was now to teach Church History, especially the history of the Lutheran Church in America. He also took on Geography and New Testament Isagogics. He retained his favorite subject, high school Latin.

Despite the great amounts of time Vic spent with coaching and teaching, he still found time for other activities. In the June of 1947 he was called to be the vacancy pastor for a dual parish at Ridgely and Essig. By October the call was accepted by Rev. N. E. Sauer of Naper, Nebraska.

At this time, Vic was also instrumental in the push to begin a new congregation in New Ulm. Five professors surveyed the town and organized the effort. They took turns preaching for the new gathering of believers until a regular pastor could be called. Prof. Richard Albrecht accepted a provisional call as pastor and had his teaching load reduced at the college. Olga and Vic were charter members when it organized as St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1948.

The congregation met for over a year in the old school at St. Paul's congregation. Eventually, land was purchased near the edge of town and a Lannon stone structure was built. Olga became the first president of the St. John's Ladies Aid. Vic preached at the church occasionally until his health forced him to discontinue. He regularly assisted with the distribution of communion. It was a goal of Vic's to write a detailed history of the congregation. He gathered his notes and organized them in longhand. He never finished. His notes are still in the archives of St. John's in New Ulm.

In 1951, Victor and other professors joined together to start a radio ministry called "The Lutheran Chapel Hour." Every Sunday a sermon would be broadcast in German and in English for the benefit of the members of the congregations who were unable to make it to church. He would preach two or three times a year. The program was broadcast on the local radio station, KNUJ.

In May of 1951, Victor Voecks was again called to fill the vacancy at Ridgely and Essig. The first hope of the congregation was for a candidate from the Seminary, but they did not receive one. Finally, in August, Dr. Paul Spaude who had resigned his call at a mission congregation that was merged with an existing congregation, accepted their call. He was living in Newport, Minnesota, at that time.

The following summer, Vic was called to serve a vacancy at the congregation in Sleepy Eye. The first call was extended to Rev. Paul F. Nolting. He accepted.

In March of that year, 1952, Vic received his only call into the pastoral ministry. The congregation in Rock Springs, Wisconsin, called him to be their shepherd. He deliberated heavily on the issue of entering the pastoral ministry, but his colleagues

convinced him to stay at the school. The school was just moving to four year status, Vic was the registrar, and the faculty was looking long and hard at the possibility of becoming state accredited. Victor returned the call on April 9, 1952.

With all the pastoral duties he was undertaking, Vic found that continuing education was necessary. To remain sharp with their Greek Language skills, a number of area pastors and professors formed a Greek Club. They met once a month and worked hard at exegesis and applications. People who were involved in this study club over the years included Rev. Gerald Hoenecke, Prof. Roland Hoenecke, Rev. LeRoy Ristow, Prof. C. J. Trapp, Prof. Walter Schmidt, Prof. Martin Albrecht, and Rev. O. J. Naumann.

On a social level, the Voecks household was also very active. Vic made sure that all the proper etiquette was followed. Olga prepared exquisite meals and hors d'oeuvres. It became a tradition to have Thanksgiving with various faculty members. When the meal was held at the Voecks's, it was a treat. Vic would carve the turkey at the table. He asked for each person's plate and which cut of meat they wanted. He proceeded to cut that precise portion perfectly.

One of Victor's hobbies was candy making. It was featured in an article for the DMLC Messenger published on December 17, 1969. Only during the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas would he make the goodies. He was a master. His setup was in the basement, and it included a large granite slab to cool the candy on. As he made the various kinds of candy, he collected the excess scrapings in a bucket. When everything was complete, he would make fudge out of whatever was in the bucket. He felt that fudge was

inferior and that no sensible candymaker should want to make it on purpose. He gave the candy he made (not the fudge) to his friends as gifts.

The atmosphere in Olga and Vic's home was very comfortable. Both husband and wife were kind and caring to all their visitors. They made people feel at ease. It was obvious to all that Christ had made them happy and that life was good.

Olga became involved in the community push for quality artistic entertainment. The Community Concert Association was formed to invite leading actors, musicians, and vocalists to New Ulm and to host them for their stay. Often the performers and other notables from the town would stop by the Voecks' house for social time after the performance.

This innocent activity in the affairs of the town was a novel idea when Vic and Olga began it. Seldom did the professors on the hill do anything with people who were not WELS Lutherans. It was not so much prejudice, I am sure, as a self-reliance born from the hard times of the depression. Because of Vic and Olga many in town saw the college in a good light. They began to take an interest in the affairs of the college. And, the people at the college mingled with the townsfolk. With the steady work of many people, including President Schweppe and later President Frey (who were both on the board of Citizens Bank in town), a strong bond was established between the city of New Ulm and DMLC.

Those good relations were established at a time of tremendous growth for the school. Because of a lack of student housing, the women at the school had to stay at homes in town. In 1945 the campus saw the first on campus housing for women. The school began to grow, and in 1948 a new dining hall was completed. Yet, the enrollment

for that year exceeded the capacity of the dining hall. Still the school grew. Centennial Hall was dedicated as the new women's dorm in 1951. Enrollment had swelled to 418.

Changes were also due in the structure of the school. The class of 1953 had the choice of graduating that year or continuing for a fourth year and graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree. 1954 saw the first four year graduating class. The high school and the college departments began to see themselves as separate entities. A milestone was attained the following year. Enrollment broke the 500 barrier. There were 504 students, with 211 in the college department and 293 in the high school. From 1955 onward, the college grew and the high school began to shrink.

Although Victor Voecks was no longer Athletic Director, he was not left out of the leadership of the college. In 1948 he became the school's registrar. He inherited the position from Prof. Richard Albrecht. When Victor began, the registrar position was not one of high regard. Prof. Albrecht had kept the records on his porch in a haphazard fashion. There was no office for the registrar on campus. But, with Vic's attention to detail and determination to do things right, that changed. When Prof. Birkholz took the job in 1961, he received an office and a secretary. The expectations of the office had changed considerably over thirteen years.

Vic was determined that the school become a respectable institution for learning. He did not want it to remain a two-bit college. To begin with, he found an office. There was an unused closet near his classroom on the second floor. The plans were that it be made into a lavatory sometime in the future. He received permission to make it into his office. Vic spent long days there. Olga would send him off to school for the class day at

7:00 a.m. and serve him supper at 5:00 p.m.. By 7:00 he would return to campus to work on the registrar's duties. He would not return until 10:00 or later. Vic methodically organized the record keeping process. He kept an eye to the future as he did so, and readied the school for progress.

Not only did Vic seek to improve his school, he looked for improvements in the other schools in the Synod. At one point he worked closely with Michigan Lutheran Seminary to come up with a standard curriculum for high school Latin. Such a curriculum would help Northwestern College with its entrance requirements.

While Vic was the registrar, the school began its four year curriculum. Graduates were awarded a degree. Enrollment skyrocketed. The school was maturing and looking toward the future. His family matured too. Naomi and Mike attended the high school on the hill, and Garda was in the upper grades at St. John's. Vic planned for his family's future as well. He bought an acre of land at Third Street South and Paine, just down the hill from his Synod home. He planned to build a house there.

For a few years, Vic was content to use the plot for gardening. He had a large garden of Gladioli. He showed his attention to detail even in his gardening. If anyone would care to pick flowers, they had to take "The Book." In The Book was a catalog of every Gladiolus plant. The picker had to write down which plant was cut and rate the quality of the flower. In the fall, Vic would dig up the bulbs which were unsatisfactory and cultivate the best ones.

In the summer of 1954, plans for the new house were started. Vic and his son Mike went to the plot and began to cut down the tall grass with a hand sickle. They were

going to trace the outline of the house and garage. Mike took the long side, then handed the sickle to his father. Vic cut grass along the short end, and then sat down to rest. He could not get up. Olga was in the house up the hill and looked out the window to see some men dragging Vic down the street. They laid him on the grass in the front lawn and called the doctor. Vic had suffered a severe heart attack at the age of 49.

It was quite ironic that the heart attack struck when it did. Vic had seen the doctor the week before and had been given a clean bill of health. Now came the long road to recovery. With the same determination as he had shown in everything else, he worked to regain his health. Vic was accustomed to smoking up to two packs of cigarettes a day. Now, seeing the results it had on his health, he quit "cold turkey." Although in moments of deep thought his hand would reach over to the corner of the desk where the ashtray used to be, he never had another cigarette.

It was a good thing for the city of New Ulm that the heart attack struck when it did. Vic and Olga never did build their new house. Within five years of the heart attack, they sold their land to the city. Today, the area at the base of the hill is the public Jackson Elementary School and the Senior High School. Vic bought the house he had lived in for his entire ministry from the Synod in January of 1973, ten months before he died.

The 1954-55 school year was a tough one for Sparky. Since he had recovered from the heart attack enough to walk, he was expected to teach his full load. He also did not see any relief with his registrar's duties. Many irate people would call looking for transcripts and other information, demanding immediate attention. He was unable to work as steadily as he had before. He was also approached by area pastors to preach for them.

In their view, he was teaching, so he could also preach. The doctor put an end to the demands. He gave Vic the choice of either teaching or preaching, but not both. The Professor chose to teach. He preached rarely from that time on. The last sermon he delivered was at his son's wedding in 1966.

Evidently, the doctor's prescription of a reduced load worked for Vic. The doctor said that people who had such severe heart attacks usually lived no longer than six more years. The doctor died, but Vic lived for almost twenty more years.

The heart attack did not alter Vic's teaching style. He was still as tough as nails. He always taught the lesson for the day. He never fell behind schedule. He always knew the answers to the questions his students asked. For some years, students in his Church History class formed the "Get Voecks Club." Their intent was to ask a question the professor could not answer. They spent time in the library researching minute tidbits of information. When they came to class, Professor Voecks always would give a short, accurate answer and get back to the lesson at hand. The students learned more outside of class sometimes than in it.

Despite Professor Voecks' adherence to the lesson plan, on one occasion the rigid schedule went out the window. The year was 1955, the month was October, the culprit was Naomi Voecks. She was one of the students in Vic's Church History class. That day, Naomi came up to her father before class and asked to have the car keys. She explained that she had left some books at home and needed to get them. After the usual lecture about being fully prepared and checking all the details, he gave her the keys. When class began, Naomi was scurrying down the hall. She entered the classroom with a fancy



birthday cake and the class sang the traditional song to their professor. His comment was, "Well, that's that." Class was cancelled. Fortunately, that spring, Naomi graduated from the college.

Victor Voecks was a loving father and husband. He went out of his way to show his dedication to his wife. He did not allow her to help him in the garden, nor to exert herself too much. At social events, he was quick to take her coat and take it to the proper place. He would return with refreshments for his wife. Always the gentleman, he treated Olga as a queen and put her on a pedestal.

When all the children had completed high school, Olga struck out on her own. She became the first faculty wife to hold a job other than teaching. She began to work at a hobby shop downtown in 1962. After the initial shock had worn off, many other faculty wives sought outside employment. Again, Vic and Olga were on the leading edge of a trend.

About that same time, Vic fulfilled a dream of his. He bought a 1961 Chevrolet. It was red and white. He had always wanted a red car. It was rather flashy for a professor to have such a car, but he did it nonetheless. His old car was a 1953 Oldsmobile. He traded in the red Chevrolet for a brown one in 1964. His encounter with life in the fast lane had ended.

Life at the college continued on the course of the last few years. Enrollment continued to grow. In 1958, Vice President H. R. Klatt resigned his post. Vic was chosen to succeed him. He was now both Vice president and Registrar. Sparky had become a trusted advisor to those on the hill. He did not like to take the lead in things, but he had

solid advice and strong opinions to share. President Schweppe enjoyed his competent assistance.

Another milestone passed for the school. 1959 was the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding. Two years later a new music hall was dedicated. In 1962, it was formally resolved that the college and high school departments separate. There was to be no crossover of faculty or administration. Victor had a choice to make: Stay at the high school and teach Latin, or continue with Church History and Isagogics at the college. He chose to remain at the college.

While Vic was both Registrar and Vice President, people began to feel that to be a quality college, DMLC needed to be recognized by the state. Victor Voecks was the man who backed the proposals and steadily worked for accreditation.

Strong opposition faced the proponents of accreditation. Many of the old guard saw no need for government supervision of a church education facility. They saw accreditation as a mixture of the roles of church and state. The matter was pertinent, and the faculty studied the issues carefully. Vic kept the process moving. Nothing was discovered that violated the principles of Scripture. In 1958, the college performed a self-study to assess its strengths and weaknesses. The push for accreditation moved forward when some of those who were outspoken against the idea retired or died.

By 1961 there was a general consensus of the faculty and the Synod that they should seek accreditation from the University of Minnesota. The University was offering accreditation as a service to the state's colleges. They would accept transfers in and out of schools with certain standards of education. Vic stepped down from the registrar's position

in 1961, and Prof. Birkholz took his place. He remained interested in accreditation during his remaining time as vice president. DMLC underwent another self-study in 1962-63 and was accepted for accreditation by the University of Minnesota.

Soon the accreditation offered by the University of Minnesota was no longer satisfactory. Regional bodies outside of the University system began to accredit colleges throughout the country. Minnesota was considering dropping its in-state system so the regional bodies could function freely. DMLC pursued accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. They hired a professional consultant in 1970 to assist with their dealings with North Central, and did another self-study. Unfortunately, Victor Voecks died before the process was complete. Other men, such as Prof. Arthur Schulz, took over. In 1974 the college received the status of candidate for accreditation. They did not need the ties with the University of Minnesota any more, so they dropped them. After several visits by North Central over six years, DMLC was granted full accreditation in 1980.

Victor Voecks served on many committees and filled in in many places as the second-in-command of the college. Especially as President Schweppe's health deteriorated, he spent time on a committee with the Aid Association for Lutherans. He gave direction and input towards the way AAL would give scholarships and other assistance to the school and its students.

Despite the progress being made at the school, it seemed that the Synod was falling apart. Relations with the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod were becoming strained. At the heart of the issue was the doctrine of church fellowship. The process of searching the

Scriptures carefully and discussing what they said with our brothers in the Missouri Synod became a long one. Many felt that an impasse had been reached long before the Wisconsin Synod ceased its negotiations. Some members of the WELS, including Prof. Edmund Reim of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, left the fellowship of the Synod. They formed a new church body, the Church of the Lutheran Confession in 1960.

The battle within the Synod was fought on a local basis in New Ulm. The pastor at St. John's was Rev. Rollin Reim, the son of the Seminary professor. He felt as his father did, that the WELS was being negligent by not severing ties with the LC-MS. Due to pressure and direction from the DMLC professors, St. John's congregation did not follow its pastor out of the WELS. However, there was much tension in New Ulm.

Victor was torn apart by this intersynodical struggle. His health suffered greatly as he debated the issues in the Synod and in his home church. Many of Olga's family were LC-MS, so the split affected their extended family as well. But, even in the midst of the agony, the Lord guided them through this trying time. Finally, the WELS broke with the Missouri Synod in 1961. With his characteristic determination, Vic continued to teach his classes and guide his school.

In 1959, the Synod had seen it wise to establish another teacher training school in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Teacher's College grew in size and popularity. Many at New Ulm saw it as a threat to the well being of their school. In 1969, at the Synod Convention, after heated debate, the decision was reached to have one teacher training school, and that it be in New Ulm. The Milwaukee school was closed and the teachers and students moved to Minnesota. As a result, DMLC saw a great deal of growth.

In 1963 a large, new dorm was completed. It was given the name "Hillview Hall." The high school and college departments were completely separated and a new system of administration was started. In 1967, Conrad Frey accepted the call to be the new President of DMLC. President Schweppe had died. He had served as president from 1936-1966. A marvelous era in the history of the schools was coming to a close. President Schweppe had lead the school through many difficult years, but had persevered. He was blessed to see the hand of the Lord show favor to his school.

President Frey had a considerably different style than his predecessor had. Frey was more of a CEO in his administration than a preacher or a teacher. He was outgoing and proactive. He eagerly sought close ties with the city of New Ulm. He joined many clubs and organizations.

President Frey also presided over the amalgamation of Milwaukee Teachers College and DMLC. New buildings were needed for the larger staff and student body. In 1968 Luther Memorial Union was dedicated. That year also saw the completion of the new Auditorium/Chapel. A new women's dorm, Highland Hall, was built in 1970, adjoining Hillview Hall.

In the fall of 1970, the staff from the Milwaukee school joined the staff on the hill. Fourteen professors were installed. The enrollment was at the highest ever, 808 in the college alone. The high school still shared the campus with the college. With the combining of the two colleges, a new curriculum was started. Students took classes in three categories: General Education, Professional Education, and Areas of Concentration. The daily schedule was adjusted as well. Classes had been held six days a week, with a half

day on Wednesday and Saturday. Now there would be five full days of class, Monday to Friday.

The growth spilled over into the next year. Eight more faculty were added in 1971, the new library was completed, and the Memorial Organ in the chapel was dedicated.

As this tremendous growth occurred, Victor faithfully taught his Church History classes and religion classes. He worked hard at completing a graph that diagrammed all the various Lutheran church bodies in America and how they merged and split. He remained a strict but fair teacher. He received some letters of appreciation from former students who thanked him for teaching them information that helped them in their teaching ministry. Despite his advancing age, he did not lose his insistence for doing things the right way. He still defended his principles.

The Voecks family life grew in happiness with the addition of grandchildren. The first was born in 1962, with another in 1966, and three in 1968. Victor loved to play with the kids. He even did some woodworking for them. He made a toy barn with which they could play. He also designed and assembled wooden trains for their enjoyment.

On November 15, 1970, the school held a special worship service that praised God for forty years of faithful service by Professor Victor Voecks. Mr. T. Pelzl was also recognized for fifty years in the teaching ministry.

As the school moved forward at a rapid pace, Victor stepped aside to let younger, more energetic men lead the school. He resigned as Vice President in 1971. He taught classes until the day he died. When the Lord called him home, the college had an

enrollment of 660 and a faculty of 68. Over the last 43 years the school had grown greatly.

Professor Victor Voecks died in his home on the morning of his birthday, October 31, 1973, at the age of 69. The funeral was held at St. John's on November 11. Rev. F. Nitz preached the sermon based on Psalm 103:15-18. The choirs from both the high school and the college sang "Be Thou Faithful Unto Death" by F. Reuter and "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Those attending the funeral commented on how joyful a service it was. Victor was in heaven, and the people there knew it and praised God for it.

At the Christmas concert given at the college that December, the choirs sang Bruce Backer's setting of "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart" in Professor Voecks' memory.

The memorials given for Prof. Voecks were used to start the "Voecks Scholarship Fund." The scholarship is intended to go to a returning senior who is a well-rounded student. It is not meant for a star in music, or sports, or academics. Nor is it to be given based on the need of the student. In memory of Victor Voecks, the student should try the hardest he or she can in every area of life. The fund began with \$1,000. By 1994 it had grown to more than \$12,000.

Professor Victor Voecks had been a pastor-teacher all his life. He had seen countless boys and girls grow up into young men and young women eager to serve the Lord. He guided his school through boom and bust. He was active in his church and in his community. He was loved by all.

Victor had strong opinions, but was conservative in his approach to everything. He was firm in his conclusions. His coaching, his teaching, and his family life were detail-

oriented. Everything had its proper place and Victor made sure everything was in it. His students knew him as a taskmaster: he was demanding, but fair. Often they appreciated his style only later when they were at the head of a classroom themselves.

In his personal relationships, Vic was always a gentleman. He was kind and encouraging to all, especially to the younger faculty members. Outside of class he was very friendly and fun loving. He was not a leader, but definitely a trusted advisor. Prof. Schulz characterized Vic as "a Bartholomew, not a Paul."

Sparky was, over all, a man who knew his Savior and showed it in every aspect of his life. The hairs on the back of his neck would bristle when he met people who paraded around their Christianity. He preferred to live his life quietly, as an example to all. His ideal was not to talk about himself, but to let others say good things about him. His humility is an inspiration to us all. If there are people in our Synod today who are as level-headed and service-minded as he was, the Lord has blessed the WELS greatly.



## Bibliography

### Book:

Schroeder, Morton A. A Time to Remember. DMLC, New Ulm: 1984.

### Periodicals:

The DMLC Messenger. Vol 60, No. 3, December 17, 1969;  
Vol 61, No. 2, December 2, 1970;  
Vol 64, No. 2, November 9 1973.

The Black and Red. Issues from the years 1918 - 1927.

The New Ulm Daily Journal. October 31, 1970;  
October 31, 1973.

The Northwestern Lutheran. December 16, 1973.

Tower Topics. December 1973.

### Interviews:

Frederich, Edward II, taught Church History, friend and colleague. 2/28/94  
Hoenecke, Roland, tutor and professor, close friend. 3/22/94  
Huebner, Lloyd, colleague. 3/29/94  
Jeske, John, tutor in 1947-48. 3/4/94  
Plocher, Naomi, daughter. 12/13/93, 2/28/94, 3/26/94  
Scharf, Erwin, schoolmate at NPS, NWC and WLS. 2/28/94  
Schulz, Arthur, colleague. 4/8/94  
Stanis, Garda, daughter. 3/13/94  
Ulichny, Robert, brother-in-law. 4/8/94  
Voecks, Herbert, brother. 3/5/94  
Voecks, Olga, wife. 1/29/94, 4/3/94  
Voecks, Michael, son. 1/29/94, 3/24/94

Personal records, memorabilia, letters, etc. of Victor F. Voecks and family.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin